

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: David and Goliath

1 Samuel 17:1-58

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to move the class beyond the popular “face your giants” reading and anchor them in the text’s actual claim: that the battle is the LORD’s and the victory is His to give. Help students see that David’s courage was not natural fearlessness but settled faith, rooted in remembered deliverances and in a high view of the living God whose honor was at stake. Draw out the deliberate contrast between Saul, the tall man Israel chose who cowered in his tent, and David, the small man God chose who ran to the battle line.

Press the application carefully. Every Christian and every congregation faces things that loom large, and the temptation is always to measure them by our own strength and shrink back, or to swagger forward in mere human bravado. Both miss the point. Faith looks past the giant to the God who has been faithful before and trusts Him to fight. Guard against turning this into a formula for guaranteed earthly success; the lesson is about trusting God, not about always winning the visible battle.

Finally, lift the class to Christ. This chapter is a chapter in a larger story that leads to the cross. As David walked alone into the valley as Israel’s champion and won a victory his trembling people could never have won, so the greater Son of David walked alone to Calvary and conquered sin, Satan, and death on behalf of a people who could not save themselves. Let the students leave worshipping the Deliverer, not merely admiring the shepherd.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does Goliath’s daily challenge and Israel’s reaction (1 Samuel 17:8–11, 24) reveal about how fear distorts the way people see God and their circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter opens with careful geography (verses 1–3): the Philistines on one mountain, Israel on another, the valley of Elah between them. This is not idle detail. It sets the stage for a standoff, two armies frozen in place, neither willing to descend into the valley first. Into that stalemate steps Goliath, and the narrator lingers over his measurements with almost numbing detail (verses 4–7): six cubits and a span, a brass helmet, a coat of mail weighing five thousand shekels, a spear like a weaver’s beam. The text wants us to feel his enormity.

Goliath's words in verses 8–10 are not merely a military proposal of single combat. They are a taunt and a defiance: "I defy the armies of Israel this day." The challenge is theological before it is martial. He is daring the God of Israel by daring His people. And Israel's response in verse 11 is total collapse: "they were dismayed, and greatly afraid." The tallest man in Israel, the king who once stood head and shoulders above the people, has nothing to say.

Notice how fear reframes reality. By verse 24, the men of Israel see Goliath and flee, "sore afraid." They have looked at the giant so long that he has filled their whole horizon. The living God, who had drowned Pharaoh's army and toppled Jericho, has shrunk in their imaginations to almost nothing. This is what unbelief does. It does not deny God exactly; it just stops factoring Him into the equation. The giant grows; God recedes.

For our class, this is the doctrinal hinge of the opening scene. Fear is not neutral. It is a kind of practical atheism, a forgetting of who God is. The same circumstance can be read two ways, and the reading depends entirely on whether the living God is present and real to the heart. Israel's problem was never the size of Goliath. It was the smallness of their God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear functions here as practical unbelief, a failure to reckon with the living God who is actually present.
- Goliath's defiance is aimed at God through His people; the contest is theological, not merely physical.
- The narrator's detailed measurements invite us to feel Israel's terror so we can later marvel at David's faith.
- Saul, the man the people chose for his height, is conspicuously silent and afraid (1 Samuel 8:19–20; 10:23).
- Remembering God's past acts (Exodus 14; Joshua 6) is the cure for the amnesia that magnifies our giants.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to name a time fear made a problem look bigger than God; what changed when they remembered who God is?
- Discuss how the same circumstance can be read by fear or by faith, and what determines which reading we choose.
- Consider why the tallest, strongest man in Israel was the most paralyzed; what does that say about human strength?

Question 2

Student Question:

When you are dismayed and greatly afraid like Saul's army, what do you tend to focus on, and how might you retrain your eyes to see the situation as David did?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 11 gives us the emotional state of God's people: "dismayed, and greatly afraid." Take that phrase seriously, because it is honest. The Bible does not pretend that faithful people never feel fear. It simply refuses to let fear have the last word. Saul and the army were not wicked men in this moment; they were frightened men, and fright had hollowed them out.

It helps to ask what they were looking at. They were looking at Goliath's height, his armor, his weapons, his record. They were looking at their own comparative weakness. They were looking, in other words, at the visible and the measurable. And the visible and measurable, taken alone, will almost always tell you to give up. Sight counsels surrender. Faith counsels advance.

David, arriving fresh from the sheepfold, looks at the very same giant and sees something the others have stopped seeing: "this uncircumcised Philistine" who has dared to "defy the armies of the living God" (verse 26). The decisive word is living. To David, God is not a doctrine or a memory but a present, breathing reality whose honor is on the line. The giant has not changed size. The viewer has changed.

This is the personal pivot for every one of us. When dismay settles over you, the question is not first "How big is my problem?" but "Where are my eyes?" Retraining the eyes is not denial; it is a deliberate act of remembering and reckoning. It is choosing to set the living God beside the giant and let Him be as large as He really is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture is honest that godly people feel fear; the issue is whether fear or faith governs the response.
- Sight fixates on the visible and measurable, which usually counsels retreat.
- David's repeated emphasis on the living God reframes the entire situation (1 Samuel 17:26, 36).
- Retraining the eyes means deliberately setting God beside the problem, not denying the problem.
- What fills our horizon shapes our courage; we become brave by enlarging our vision of God.

Discussion Prompts

- Have students name what they habitually stare at when afraid, and how they might lift their gaze.
- Discuss the difference between denying a hard reality and reframing it in light of the living God.
- Ask how regular worship and Scripture keep the living God large and present in our daily sight.

Question 3

Student Question:

How had God prepared David in the secret place of the sheepfold (1 Samuel 17:34–37), and what does this teach about where real spiritual courage is formed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Saul tries to talk David out of the fight, David answers not with bravado but with testimony (verses 34–37). He tells of the lion and the bear, how, while keeping his father's sheep, he had struck and delivered the flock from beasts that would have devoured them. These were not photo opportunities. They were terrifying, private, dangerous moments with no audience and no applause.

Here is the quiet truth the chapter wants us to grasp: David's public courage in the valley was forged in the private faithfulness of the pasture. Long before anyone knew his name, he was learning that God delivers. The sheepfold was his seminary. The lonely nights with the flock were where his theology of God's faithfulness moved from his head into his hands.

David's reasoning is beautiful in its logic (verse 37): "The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." He is not boasting in his own track record. He is boasting in God's. Each past deliverance is a deposit of evidence that the same God will be faithful again. Faith remembers, and remembering fuels confidence.

This reframes how we think about the unglamorous parts of our lives. The hidden faithfulness of today, the unnoticed obedience, the small battles no one sees, are not wasted. They are the very place God is preparing us for what is coming. We tend to despise the pasture and crave the valley. God uses the pasture to get us ready for the valley.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Courage in public was formed by faithfulness in private; the sheepfold prepared the valley.
- David boasts not in his record but in God's; past deliverances are evidence of God's character.
- Faith remembers concrete acts of God and reasons forward from them (1 Samuel 17:37; Psalm 77:11).
- Hidden, unnoticed obedience is not wasted; it is preparation God is using even when we cannot see it.
- We are prone to despise the ordinary pasture and crave the dramatic valley, but God works through both.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each person to recall a past deliverance and how remembering it could strengthen present faith.

- Discuss how to value the hidden, unglamorous seasons as God's training ground.
- Consider how keeping a record of God's faithfulness builds courage for future trials.

Question 4

Student Question:

Where in your hidden, unseen daily faithfulness might God be quietly preparing you for a battle you cannot yet see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

There is a temptation to skip from David's testimony straight to the stone and miss the strange little scene with the armor (verses 38–39). Saul, wanting to help, dresses David in his own armor, helmet of brass, coat of mail, sword. It is the best equipment in Israel. And David tries to walk in it and cannot. "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them."

This is more than a quaint detail about a boy in oversized gear. Saul's armor represents the world's way of fighting, the obvious, sensible, conventional approach. If you are going to face a giant, surely you want the biggest sword and the heaviest plate. But David knows that this is not where his strength lies, and to borrow Saul's armor would be to fight Saul's way and forfeit his own God-given confidence.

So David puts it off and takes up what is genuinely his: a staff, a sling, and five smooth stones from the brook (verse 40). To the watching armies it looks like folly, almost like a death wish. But David is not trusting the sling. He is trusting the LORD who is mighty to save, and he will use the tools God has actually placed in his hand rather than the impressive tools that are not his.

The lesson for us is searching. How often do we try to fight spiritual battles in borrowed armor, copying someone else's methods, leaning on cleverness or human technique or the world's strategies, instead of walking in simple obedience and trust? God does not need our impressive equipment. He delights to save by means that make it obvious the victory was His.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul's armor pictures the world's conventional methods; David refuses what he has not proved.
- God often works through humble, unimpressive means so the glory is unmistakably His (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).
- Borrowing another's armor can mean abandoning the God-given path and confidence that is truly ours.
- David uses the ordinary tools already in his hand, not despising them but not trusting in them either.
- True faith is not careless or presumptuous; it acts wisely while resting wholly on God.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask where students have tried to serve God in borrowed armor that did not fit them.
- Discuss how to discern the difference between godly wisdom and merely worldly method.
- Consider why God often chooses weak and unimpressive means to accomplish His purposes.

Question 5

Student Question:

Why did David refuse Saul's armor (1 Samuel 17:38–40), and what does this reveal about trusting God's way of deliverance rather than the world's equipment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We come now to the verbal exchange before the physical one (verses 41–47). Goliath despises David, curses him by his gods, and promises to feed his flesh to the birds. It is the language of overwhelming, contemptuous power. And David answers with words that are among the most important in the whole Old Testament narrative of faith.

“Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied” (verse 45). Notice the contrast David draws. Goliath trusts his weapons; David trusts a name. The LORD of hosts is the God who commands armies; the giant has unwittingly picked a fight not with a shepherd boy but with the Almighty.

Then comes the great declaration in verses 46–47: “This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand. . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. . . for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.” Everything hangs on that sentence. David is not the hero of this story in his own eyes. He is a willing instrument. The battle, the strategy, the strength, and the outcome all belong to the LORD.

Sit with the phrase “the battle is the LORD's.” It does not mean we do nothing; David still ran toward the giant. It means the outcome rests in God's hands, not ours, and our task is to obey and trust. The purpose is even bigger than David's survival: “that all the earth may know that there is a God.” The victory is meant to display God to the watching world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The contest is named rightly: Goliath trusts weapons, David trusts the name of the LORD of hosts.
- “The battle is the LORD's” means the outcome belongs to God while we still obey and act.
- The ultimate purpose is God's glory, that all the earth may know there is a God (1 Samuel 17:46).
- David sees himself as instrument, not hero; the strength and strategy are God's.

- Faith both rests in God and runs toward the battle line; trust does not cancel action.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to put “the battle is the LORD’s” into their own words and apply it to a current trial.
- Discuss how holding both truths, God acts and we obey, guards us from passivity and from self-reliance.
- Consider how God uses our trials as a stage to display Himself to those watching our lives.

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you been tempted to fight a spiritual battle with “Saul’s armor,” borrowed methods that are not really yours and not really God’s?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 48 is easy to read past, but it is full of force: “David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.” He ran toward the giant. Faith here is not passive waiting; it is active, forward-leaning obedience. Because David was certain the battle belonged to the LORD, he had nothing to lose by advancing. Settled confidence in God produced bold movement, not paralysis.

This is where so many of us stall. We say we trust God, but our trust never translates into a step. We stand at the edge of the valley reasoning about the size of the giant. David’s faith had feet. He had reckoned with God, settled the matter in his heart, and so he could move without hesitation. The running is the evidence of the believing.

Consider what David was not doing. He was not waiting for the fear to disappear before he acted. He was not waiting for better odds or a clearer guarantee. He acted on what he knew to be true about God, and the action itself was an expression of worship. Sometimes the most faithful thing we can do is take the next obedient step before all our feelings have caught up.

For the believer, this turns abstract trust into something concrete. What does it look like this week to run toward, rather than away from, the thing God is calling you to face? Trusting that the battle is the Lord’s is meant to free us to obey boldly, not to sit and wait for the giant to wander off.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith here is active and forward-leaning; David ran toward the battle (1 Samuel 17:48).
- Genuine trust in God produces movement and obedience, not paralysis.
- David acted before his feelings caught up; obedience need not wait for fear to vanish.
- Confidence that the outcome rests with God frees us to take the next obedient step.
- Worry stalls at the edge of the valley; faith has feet and advances.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask what it would look like this week to run toward something they have been avoiding in fear.
- Discuss why genuine trust always shows itself in action, however small the first step.
- Consider how to obey before our emotions agree, trusting God with the outcome.

Question 7

Student Question:

What is the full meaning of David's declaration that "the battle is the LORD's" (1 Samuel 17:45–47), and how does it reframe the whole confrontation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the stone flies and finds its mark (verses 49–51). One smooth stone sinks into Goliath's forehead, and the giant who terrified a nation falls face down to the earth. David, having no sword of his own, takes Goliath's own sword and finishes the work. The narrator notes pointedly that David prevailed "with a sling and with a stone. . . but there was no sword in the hand of David" (verse 50). The means were humble so the source of victory would be unmistakable.

Read this in light of David's words. He had said, "the LORD saveth not with sword and spear" (verse 47), and the outcome proves it. The deliverance came not by superior weaponry but by the living God acting through a trusting servant. The smallness of David and the slingstone makes the greatness of God shine all the brighter.

There is a striking irony in David using Goliath's own sword against him. The very instrument of the enemy's strength becomes the means of his defeat. The thing meant to destroy God's people is turned back on the destroyer. Keep this image in mind, because it will deepen when we look ahead to Christ.

The watching Philistines, who had pinned their hopes on their champion, flee when they see him fall (verse 51). One man's defeat decides the fate of the whole army. This is representative combat: the champion stands in for the people, and as the champion goes, so go the people. That principle is the doorway into the gospel.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Victory came by humble means so the glory belonged unmistakably to God (1 Samuel 17:50).
- David fulfills his own word: the LORD saves not with sword and spear (1 Samuel 17:47).
- Goliath is slain with his own sword; the enemy's weapon becomes the means of his defeat.
- This is representative combat: the champion stands for the people, and his outcome is theirs.

- The principle of one standing for many opens the way to understanding Christ's work.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask how the humble means of victory keep us from boasting in ourselves.
- Discuss the irony of Goliath being slain with his own sword and where Scripture echoes this pattern.
- Introduce the idea of a champion standing for the people as a bridge to the work of Christ.

Question 8

Student Question:

How would your worry change this week if you truly believed that the battle you are dreading belongs to the Lord and not to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Step back from the action and let the chapter examine your heart. The honest question this passage raises is not "Could I be as brave as David?" but "Do I actually believe the battle is the Lord's?" Most of our worry is rooted in a quiet assumption that the outcome depends on us. We carry weights we were never meant to carry because we have not truly handed the battle over to God.

Imagine living a week as though that single sentence were true. The conversation you dread, the diagnosis you fear, the temptation that keeps defeating you, the relationship that feels beyond repair. What if you genuinely believed that the outcome rests in God's hands and your job is simply to trust and obey? The dread would not vanish entirely, but it would lose its tyranny.

David's freedom on the battlefield came from a settled conviction in his heart before he ever reached the valley. He had already decided who God was. The battle was won internally long before the stone flew. Our peace, likewise, is the fruit of a settled trust formed in quieter moments, in prayer, in the Word, in remembering God's faithfulness.

So this is the searching application: where have you been treating a battle as yours that actually belongs to the Lord? Name it honestly. Then deliberately, prayerfully, place it back into His hands, and ask Him for the grace to take the next obedient step while trusting Him with what you cannot control.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worry usually springs from the assumption that the outcome depends on us.
- Believing the battle is the Lord's does not erase difficulty but breaks its tyranny over us.
- David's battlefield freedom flowed from a conviction settled in his heart beforehand.
- Peace is the fruit of trust formed in quiet times of prayer, the Word, and remembering God.

- Faith means trusting God with outcomes while still taking the next obedient step (Philippians 4:6–7).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each person to name one battle they have been carrying as their own and to hand it back to God.
- Discuss what changes in our anxiety when we truly believe outcomes rest in God's hands.
- Consider the daily habits that settle our trust before the valley arrives.

Question 9

Student Question:

How does David, the unlikely deliverer who wins a victory his people could not win for themselves, point us forward to Jesus Christ, the greater Son of David (1 Samuel 17:50–51; Hebrews 2:14–15; Colossians 2:15)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now lift your eyes to the horizon of the whole Bible. David is the unlikely deliverer, the overlooked youngest son, who steps into the valley alone as Israel's champion and wins a victory the trembling people could never have won for themselves. By his single triumph, the whole army is delivered. Hold that picture, because it is a shadow cast forward by a greater reality.

Generations later, another Son of David, the One the New Testament calls the Son of David again and again, came down into a far deeper valley. He faced an enemy more terrible than Goliath: sin, Satan, and death itself, the powers that had held the whole human race in fear and bondage. And He faced them not with a sword but, astonishingly, by giving Himself up to death on a cross.

Hebrews 2:14–15 tells us that through death Jesus destroyed “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Colossians 2:15 says He “spoiled principalities and powers. . . triumphing over them.” Like David taking Goliath's own sword, Christ took the enemy's great weapon, death, and turned it into the very means of victory. The cross looked like defeat and was in fact the decisive triumph.

And here is the gospel heart of it: we did not win this battle, any more than Israel's soldiers won at Elah. We stood trembling and helpless on the hillside while our Champion went down into the valley alone. His victory is counted as ours. This is why we do not merely admire David; we worship the greater Son of David, who reigns now, having conquered, at the right hand of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David is a foreshadowing of Christ, the greater Son of David and true Champion of His people.
- Christ faced the deeper enemies of sin, Satan, and death, and conquered through the cross (Hebrews 2:14–15).
- Like Goliath slain with his own sword, death became the very means of Christ's triumph (Colossians 2:15).
- The victory is representative; His people are delivered by His work, not their own (Romans 5:18–19).
- Christ reigns now as the victorious King; this is not a deferred or future-only triumph (Acts 2:32–36; Colossians 1:13).

Discussion Prompts

- Trace the parallels and the contrasts between David at Elah and Christ at the cross.
- Discuss how Christ's victory becomes ours and what it means to rest in a battle already won.
- Consider how this passage moves us from admiring a hero to worshiping the Deliverer.

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Christ is forming you through this passage to trust the living God rather than the size of the giant in front of you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring it home and make it personal. The whole chapter has been pressing one truth into us: the living God is bigger than the giant, and the battle belongs to Him. The question now is what He is forming in you through these verses. Sanctification is not abstract; it touches the specific fears and self-reliance that you carry into this very week.

Perhaps Christ is forming in you a willingness to stop measuring your giant against your own strength and start measuring it against His. Perhaps He is teaching you to remember His past deliverances and reason forward from them. Perhaps He is calling you to lay down some borrowed armor, some worldly method you have leaned on, and walk in simple trust and obedience instead.

Whatever it is, name it specifically. Vague resolutions evaporate. "I will trust God more" fades by Tuesday. But "This week I will face that conversation, believing the battle is the Lord's," or "I will stop fighting this temptation in my own strength and bring it honestly to God," has feet. David's faith had feet, and so should ours.

End by lifting your eyes once more to the greater Son of David. The reason you can run toward your valley is that your Champion has already won the decisive battle. You face your giants not

to earn God's favor but as one already delivered, already loved, already on the winning side. Let that settle into your heart, and then take the next obedient step.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sanctification is specific; it touches the actual fears and self-reliance we carry this week.
- Christ forms in us the habit of measuring giants against God, not against our strength.
- Vague resolutions fade; faith expresses itself in concrete, named obedience.
- We face our giants as people already delivered and loved, not to earn God's favor.
- The settled fact of Christ's finished victory is what frees us to run toward our valleys.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each student to name one concrete, specific step of trusting obedience for this week.
- Discuss why specific commitments take root where vague ones evaporate.
- Close by resting the class in Christ's finished victory as the ground of all their courage.